

Message Text

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USCONSULATES IN MEXICO (POUCH

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DEA MEX 0146

DEAHQS FOR ENOL, EN, IG

GENEVA FOR PETER BENSINGER AND MATHEA FALCO

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TAGS:SNAR/MX

SUBJECT: NARCOTICS - DECLINE IN GOM ERADICATION STATISTICS

(GFTA-75-8001 PHASE I/78)

1. SUMMARY: STATISTICS CONCERNING THE NUMBER OF FIELDS LOCATED AND DESTROYED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 1978 ARE CONSISTENTLY BELOW STATISTICS FOR COMPARABLE PERIODS LAST YEAR. THIS MESSAGE, PREPARED BY DEA TRIZO INTELLIGENCE AGENT JAMES ROTH, DISCUSSES THE VARIOUS FACTORS THAT MAY EXPLAIN THIS STATISTICAL DROP AND CONCLUDES THAT WE DO NOT YET HAVE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO DETERMINE WHICH FACTORS ARE RESPONSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

2. IF THE POPPY FIELDS OF MEXICO ARE AS NUMEROUS AS THEY WERE IN THE PAST, THE DECLINE IN STATISTICS COULD BE DUE TO LESS EFFECTIVE RECONNAISSANCE AND ERADICATION PROGRAMS.

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THERE IS, HOWEVER, NO INFORMATION PRESENTLY AVAILABLE TO SUGGEST THIS EXPLANATION.

3. THIS YEAR'S CAMPAIGN BEGAN WITH A CONCERTED RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM WHICH INCLUDED 155 RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS DURING THE FIRST TWO WEEKS. 1,583 POPPY FIELDS WERE LOCATED, AS COMPARED WITH 2,705 POPPY FIELDS LOCATED DURING

THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF LAST YEAR'S CAMPAIGN. THE CONSENSUS OF OPINION AMONG DEA OBSERVERS IN THE FIELD IS THAT SECTOR COVERAGE HAS BEEN EFFICIENT. THE ASSIGNED AREAS HAVE BEEN FLOWN METHODICALLY AND AT AN APPROPRIATE ALTITUDE.

4. A CONTRARY OPINION HAS ALSO BEEN EXPRESSED. TWO PARTICIPANTS, ONE DEA OBSERVER AND ONE MEXICAN SPOTTER, FEEL THAT THE RECONNAISSANCE AREA HAS BEEN DEFINED BY POLITICAL PRESSURE AND IS TOO AMBITIOUS IN SCOPE. AS A RESULT, INSUFFICIENT TIME WAS ALLOTTED FOR THE LOCATION OF FIELDS IN KNOWN GROWING AREAS, AND TOO MUCH TIME WASTED IN AREAS WHERE POPPIES ARE NOT GROWN.

5. IT IS TRUE THAT THE PRIMARY POPPY GROWING AREAS WERE COVERED DURING THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF THE RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM. SECTOR 252 IN THE STATE OF GUERRERO CAN ALSO SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE PROBLEM EXPRESSED ABOVE. RECONNAISSANCE REPORTED 10 POPPY FIELDS IN THAT SECTOR. THE ERADICATION TEAM SUBSEQUENTLY LOCATED AND DESTROYED 73 POPPY FIELDS IN THAT SECTOR. IT IS COMMON FOR ERADICATION MISSIONS, WHICH FLY VERY CLOSE TO THE GROUND AND UTILIZE TWO AIRCRAFT, TO LOCATE AND DESTROY A HIGHER NUMBER OF FIELDS THAN HAVE BEEN REPORTED BY RECONNAISSANCE, BUT THE DISPARITY IN THE ABOVE FIGURES IS SIGNIFICANT. SECTOR 252 IS NOT A TYPICAL SECTOR, REPRESENTING ALL OF THE RECONLIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NAISSANCE PROGRAM, BUT IT DOES POINT OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT MORE TIME COULD HAVE BEEN SPENT IN SOME AREAS.

6. ERADICATION MISSIONS ARE NOT, ON THE WHOLE, REPORTED TO DEA BY THE GOM IN SUCH A MANNER AS TO FACILITATE COMPARISONS SUCH AS THE ONE ABOVE. IN MOST INSTANCES ONLY THE TOTAL NUMBER OF FIELDS DESTROYED IN A STATE IS REPORTED. SECTOR NUMBERS AND COORDINATES ARE SELDOM SPECIFIED.

7. DEA OBSERVERS, WHO HAVE THUS FAR CONCENTRATED ON RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS, HAVE NOT YET PARTICIPATED IN VERIFICATION MISSIONS TO DETERMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ERADICATION PROGRAM. HOWEVER, TWO EMBASSY OFFICERS, INCLUDING ONE FROM DEA, ARE CURRENTLY IN THE FIELD WITH THE INTENTION OF SPOT CHECKING CERTAIN SECTORS.

8. A COMPARISON HAS BEEN MADE OF THE NUMBER OF FIELDS LOCATED BY THE RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM, AND THE NUMBER OF FIELDS DESTROYED BY THE RELATIVELY SEPARATE BUT COORDINATED ERADICATION PROGRAM. THE FIGURES FROM THE TWO SOURCES TEND TO SUBSTANTIATE ONE ANOTHER AND INDICATE THAT ERADICATION EFFORTS ARE KEEPING PACE WITH THE RECONNAIS-

SANCE PROGRAM.

9. THIS YEAR'S DROP IN STATISTICS COULD ALSO BE DUE TO A DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF POPPY FIELDS IN THE TRADITIONAL GROWING AREAS OF MEXICO. SUCH A DECREASE HAS BEEN SUGGESTED BY DEA OBSERVERS AND COOPERATING INDIVIDUALS AS WELL AS THE INTERPRETATION OF STATISTICS. IF THERE ARE FEWER FIELDS, SEVERAL DIFFERENT FACTORS COULD BE RESPONSIBLE:

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(A) DURING THE FALL CAMPAIGN OF 1977, 15,777 POPPY FIELDS WERE DESTROYED. DURING THE FALL CAMPAIGN OF 1976, 8,128 POPPY FIELDS WERE DESTROYED. IF THERE ARE NOW FEWER FIELDS IN MEXICO, IT COULD BE DUE IN PART TO THE INCREASED MAGNITUDE OF LAST YEAR'S ERADICATION EFFORT.

(B) THE CURRENT CLIMATIC CONDITIONS IN MEXICO COULD ALSO BE A VERY SIGNIFICANT FACTOR. DEA OBSERVERS IN SEVERAL AREAS HAVE REPORTED VERY DRY CONDITIONS WHERE THERE WAS PREVIOUSLY GREEN VEGETATION AND RUNNING WATER. THE GOVERNOR OF SINALOA (THE PRIMARY POPPY GROWING AREA) HAS ATTEMPTED TO HAVE HIS STATE RECOGNIZED AS A DROUGHT AREA CLAIMING THAT IT HAS BEEN HIT BY THE WORST DROUGHT IN 40 YEARS. HE HAS STATED THAT NEARLY HALF OF THE ARABLE PORTION OF HIS STATE CANNOT BE PLANTED DUE TO THE LACK OF WATER, AND LEGITIMATE CROP LOSSES ARE EXPECTED TO HIT \$150 MILLION. OTHER EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE REPORTED THAT NORTHWESTERN MEXICO IS VERY DRY, AND THE EMBASSY'S NATION-

AL WEATHER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE HAS REPORTED THAT RAIN-FALL IN CHOIX, SINALOA IS WELL BELOW AVERAGE.

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(C) AS POPPY FARMERS DEPEND UPON RAINFALL AND WATER IN NEARBY STREAMS, THE CURRENT DRY CONDITIONS ARE LIKELY TO HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON POPPY GROWTH. A POOR POPPY CROP IN SINALOA WOULD HAVE AN EFFECT UPON THE AVAILABILITY OF OPIUM THROUGHOUT MEXICO.

10. ONE BAROMETER OF THE AVAILABILITY OF OPIUM AND HEROIN IN MEXICO IS THE RATE OF INTERDICTION OF THOSE COMMODITIES WITHIN THE COUNTRY AND AT ITS BORDERS. EXAMINATION OF THE INTERDICTION FIGURES FOR THIS YEAR INDICATES THAT THEY HAVE NOT YET VARIED SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THE AVERAGE FIGURES FOR LAST YEAR. INTERDICTION FIGURES ARE, OF COURSE, SUSCEPTIBLE TO GREAT FLUCTUATION, BUT SEIZURES OF HEROIN, OPIUM, AND POPPY SEEDS FOR THE FIRST FIVE WEEKS OF 1978 ARE VERY CLOSE TO THE AVERAGE WEEKLY FIGURES WHICH PREVAILED THROUGHOUT 1977. THESE INTERDICTION FIGURES MAY INDICATE GREATER MEXICAN EFFECTIVENESS IN SEIZING A DIMINISHING SUPPLY OR MAY INDICATE THAT OPIATE AVAILABILITY IN 1978 HAS NOT CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY WHEN COMPARED TO A COMPARABLE PERIOD OF 1977.

11. INFORMATION CURRENTLY AVAILABLE IS TOO INCONCLUSIVE TO EXPLAIN SATISFACTORILY WHY RECONNAISSANCE AND ERADICATION STATISTICS HAVE DECLINED. IT IS PREMATURE TO CLAIM THAT WE HAVE "TURNED THE CORNER", YET THERE IS INSUFFICIENT REASON TO ASSUME THAT THE GOM IS CONDUCTING THE CAMPAIGN WITH ANY LESS VIGOR THAN LAST YEAR. WE WILL REPORT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS IT BECOMES AVAILABLE.

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